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Overrating the Peril of a Few More Spies

In these first weeks of the new political year the administration has been able to get our eye back on the ball. Vietnam may be our most passionate immediate problem, but by far our biggest problem remains the old familiar; the President of the U.S. is said to have at his command a nuclear force that works out at 35,000 tons of TNT for every human being alive. The Russians have a little less, but not enough less to matter.

The problem is to achieve a mood and an arrangement whereby, at the very least, this awful force will never be used. At most, the problem is to find a way whereby—as Red China has feared aloud and Undersecretary Katzenbach the other day hoped aloud—the two giants can join to prevent smaller nations now coming to possess nuclear weapons from ever using them.

A host of little things can contribute to a mood for agreement. At present one little thing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is the Consular treaty, negotiated by the U.S. and Russia in 1964, backed 19 to 5 by the Foreign Relations Committee, but never carried forth to ratification. The obstacle has been J. Edgar Hoover's fear that it would permit more Russian spies to come into our cities and increase his counter-espionage difficulties. Mr. Hoover's objections have been enough to cause Senator Dirksen to announce he will not vote to ratify, and to cast doubt on the administration's ability to get the necessary two-thirds vote in the Senate.

People who have studied the spy business in depth think Mr. Hoover's objections are misconceived. In modern times spies do not have serious trouble getting information in any country, for it is nearly impossible to keep clues out of newspapers and speeches.

Allen Dulles who served longest as head of the CIA said 90 percent of our informa-

tion about Russia comes from open, public sources. These sources are pretty good—for example we know around which towns the Russians have been deploying anti-missile missiles, and how many divisions they have removed from eastern Europe and sent to their border with China. It has also been estimated that about 97 percent of what they know about us is publicly available, in newspapers, or in brochures at industrial conferences, or in public hearings in Congress.

Getting the information is not hard. The problem lies in interpreting it accurately. Correct and relevant information is generally lost in a maze of irrelevant information. It is hard to estimate which is decoy and which is genuine.

For example, every one of Hitler's surprise attacks on his neighbors in World War II was known beforehand and the information was communicat-

ed to the victim-nation. Russia was told weeks beforehand when and where Hitler would invade her soil. Stalin did not take the information seriously. The U.S. knew all it had to know to get our fleet and planes out of Pearl Harbor, but underestimated the validity of the information. Hitler was given the date and place of the allied invasion of Normandy by his spies, but gave it no higher value than a host of rumors, and therefore was caught out.

An increase in the number of Russian spies is therefore not likely to matter greatly. It would be a pity to let the fear of it cause us to fail to take action to improve relations now that action is possible.

Two huge developments have made the world ripe for such an improvement. The first of them is the 50th birthday of the Russian revolution, to be celebrated this year. The

Russian leaders appear to feel every day of its age, and would like to relax and derive a little more well-being from their economy and settle troubles rather than start them.

The other development has been the national nervous breakdown of Red China. As the London Economist observed recently, the so-called "Cultural Revolution" is giving all revolutions a bad name, and we may see that mode of changing things go out of favor in the world for the first time since 1789. Meanwhile, Russia is clearly so anxious to devote close attention to her border with China that she would like to stabilize relations elsewhere.

If we are to miss the chance to improve relations, we should have very good reasons for missing it. Mr. Hoover's fear of a dozen more spies is not a good reason.